

# USAFE: Comm gets in the game

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**RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany** — “Train as we fight” is the approach United States Air Forces in Europe is taking to prepare its people for future deployments. A step in obtaining that vision is the expansion of its Silver Flag exercise to include a wider range of support personnel. For the first time in USAFE’s history, communications and information specialists trained with a 200-plus Expeditionary Combat Support team during a Silver Flag exercise held at Ramstein Air Base, Germany.

Silver Flag started in September of 1979 providing Civil Engineering with a means to practice the bed-down of a remote bare base. Through the years, services squadrons joined CE in practicing the bare base build up. Now, USAFE has expanded this training even further to include the remaining ECS forces: Communications, Security Forces, Medical, Logistics and Public Affairs. This opportunity makes Silver Flag unique by eliminating the interoperability vacuum normally caused by simulation of forces.

In previous Silver Flag exercises, CE and Services simulated working with Security Forces, Communications, and Logistics. Now Silver Flag provides all the ECS forces valuable training as they work together to build a bare base. Col. Steven Muhs, acting deputy director, USAFE Communications and Information, said, “Silver Flag provides a great opportunity to make sure our combat support forces are ready when the combatant commander says go.”

Forty-one Airmen from the 31st Communications Squadron, Aviano Air Base, Italy, were the first communicators

to participate in Silver Flag.

“Overall, I believe this course does an excellent job of defining, illustrating, and then employing the principles of the deployment lifecycle. It gave everyone a first time look or refresher on the process,” said Staff Sgt. Rob Thompson from the 31st CS.

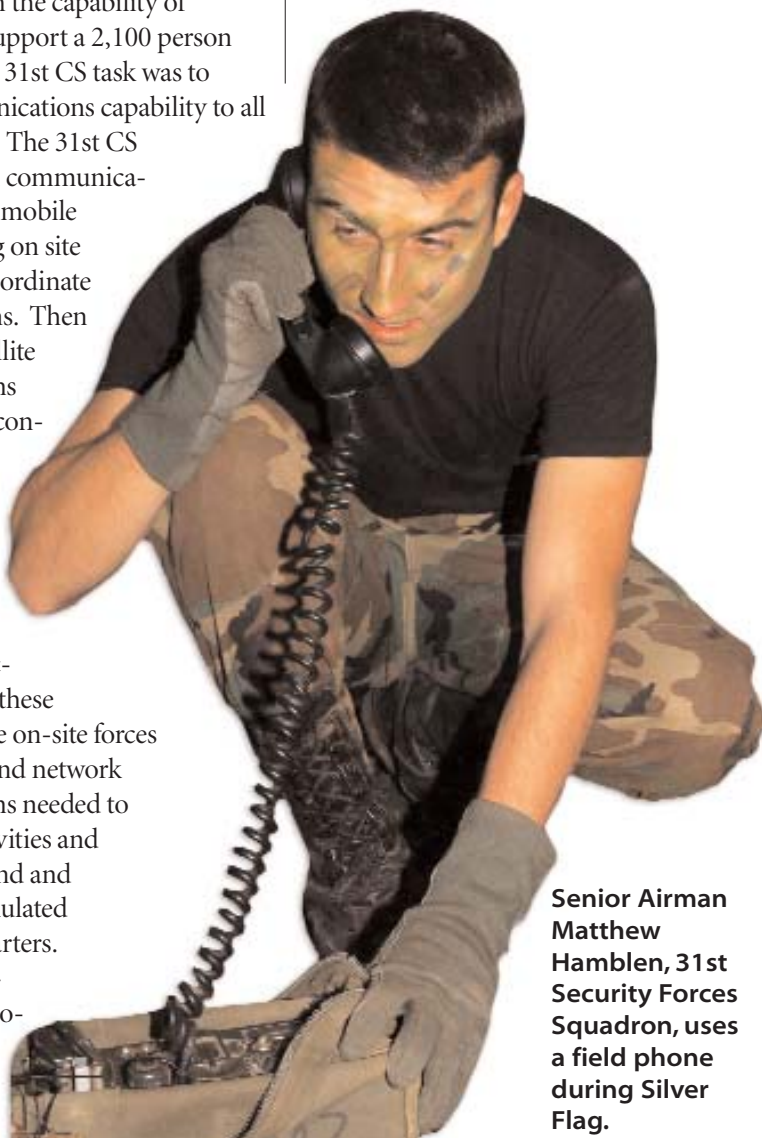
During Silver Flag, the participants started out with four days of classroom training followed by a four day field exercise. The objective was to plan and execute the building of a bare base for 225 people with the capability of expanding to support a 2,100 person operation. The 31st CS task was to deliver communications capability to all the ECS forces. The 31st CS provided initial communications with land mobile radios, allowing on site personnel to coordinate setup operations. Then they set up satellite communications and a network control center providing reach back capability through an established network infrastructure. Together, these capabilities gave on-site forces the telephone and network communications needed to coordinate activities and extend command and control to a simulated higher headquarters.

Several challenges were introduced to include simulated com-

munications outages and changes in MOPP conditions. This gave the comm warriors the opportunity to practice their troubleshooting abilities and to exercise their ability to operate in chemical warfare gear.

Silver Flag provides an opportunity to train and prepare USAFE’s troops for real-world deployments. Integrating the troops during Silver Flag paves the way for successful operations in the field.

USAFE plans to hold six Silver Flag exercises each year.



**Senior Airman Matthew Hamblen, 31st Security Forces Squadron, uses a field phone during Silver Flag.**